

BLM WH&B NEWS



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Contact: Chris Tincher or Hans Stuart
405-790-1009 or 505-438-7514

BLM PROTECTS WILD HORSES FROM EXPOSURE TO EQUINE INFECTIOUS ANEMIA

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is taking steps to protect wild horses from further exposure to equine infectious anemia at a holding facility in Catoosa, Oklahoma. A domestic horse near the facility was discovered to have the disease in mid-May and was euthanized on Memorial Day.

Equine infectious anemia (EIA) is a potentially fatal viral disease that affects members of the horse family. There is no vaccine, treatment or cure for EIA and infected horses remain carriers of the virus for life.

Dr. Carey Floyd, Area Veterinarian with the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry (ODAFF), notified the BLM about the EIA case. Today the Bureau is working with Dr. Floyd to implement a plan to protect its horses. "Our goal is to protect these wild symbols of the West from exposure to the disease," said John Mehlhoff, BLM Field Manager in Tulsa. "All of the horses at our facility tested negative for the disease before they were brought into Oklahoma."

The BLM has created a new barrier within its enclosed pasture across a county road from the infected horse to establish a standard 200-yard buffer zone from the last known case of EIA. This second barrier will be maintained until testing shows no further cases of EIA in the area. Dr. Floyd is continuing epidemiological investigations to attempt to determine the source of the disease and to identify any other horses with EIA. The contractor who operates the BLM's horse facility is meeting with surrounding neighbors in Catoosa to explain what actions are being taken to protect the wild horses.

"Oklahoma EIA regulations require horses within 200-yards of a positive EIA case be tested 60 days after the removal of the infected animal," says Dr. Floyd. "We plan to test all of the potentially exposed animals by early fall to determine whether the disease has spread to any of the wild horses."

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Through an agreement between BLM and ODAFF, the wild horses will be tested as soon as they can be safely gathered. The BLM will use water traps to entice wild horses on the holding facility into smaller corrals for testing.

“We sincerely hope this disease has not spread, because any infected horses will have to be euthanized,” Mehlhoff added.

The BLM manages wild horses on public lands throughout the West, and removes horses when overpopulation or severe local conditions threaten their health and the rangelands they depend on for their livelihood. Once removed, these animals are not returned to public lands, but are offered for adoption to people that qualify for the program. In the meantime, older wild horses that are not readily adoptable are placed in holding facilities.

The BLM’s wild horse and burro adoption program was established in the early 1970s as part of its effort to manage wild horse and burro herds. The adoption program has successfully placed 195,000 animals, but there are 18,000 wild horses still in need of placement.

Long-term holding facilities were established through private contractors as a temporary means of caring for wild horses until they can be adopted or they complete their natural cycle of life. The Catoosa facility holds about 2,000 geldings in several distinct pastures.

All animals that are removed from public lands and made available for adoption or placed in holding facilities receive a clean bill of health by a certified veterinarian and possess a negative Coggins test (the only known method to determine if a horse has EIA) and vaccinations for other common equine diseases including West Nile.

The Bureau of Land Management is responsible for managing the nation’s public lands. With the passage of the Wild Free-Roaming Horses and Burros Act of 1971, the Bureau gained the responsibility to care for wild horses and burros on these lands in harmony with other natural resources. When an over-population of wild horses and burros exists on these public lands, some animals are removed and offered to the general public for adoption.